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# Farewell Sermon,

PREACHED AT

## ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, BOSTON,

OCTOBER 3, 1858.

BY

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ALEXANDER H. VINTON.

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# PRAYER.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, grant that by the operation of the Holy Ghost all Christians may be so joined together in unity of spirit and in the bond of peace, that they may be a holy temple acceptable unto Thee.

And especially to this congregation present give the abundance of Thy grace, that with one heart they may desire the prosperity of Thy holy Apostolic Church, and with one mouth may profess the faith once delivered to the Saints.

Defend them from the sins of heresy and schism. Let not the foot of pride come nigh to hurt them, nor the hand of the ungodly to cast them down.

And grant that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy government that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all Godly quietness; that so they may walk in the ways of truth and peace, and at last be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting, through Thy merits, O blessed Jesus, Thou gracious Bishop and Shepherd of our souls, who art with the Father and the Holy Ghost one God, world without end. AMEN.

# FAREWELL SERMON.

GENESIS, xxxi. 49.

"MIZPAH: THE LORD WATCH BETWEEN ME AND THEE WHEN WE ARE ABSENT ONE FROM ANOTHER."

WE recognize the Lord in our sadnesses, however we may at other times forget him. We invoke his aid for the blind future of our lives, whenever our present comfort fails.

Laban and Jacob had dwelt together for twenty years. Their natural relationship had become fastened by domestic ties.

The nephew and servant-boy was now a son-in-law and an equal; and being convinced that high expediency required it, he had left his father's house to establish a home for himself. Laban followed after him, indignantly, and with resentment. But God had warned him to do or speak no harm; and when they met, his anger was melted into

tenderness, and his expostulation changed to a God-speed.

Instead of a quarrel, there was a covenant. A monument of stones was erected,—towards man a memorial of friendship, towards God an altar of piety. They sacrificed and fed together, and then they parted. And they called the monument "Mizpah:" "The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another." It was a sweet parting, worthy of a holy love. Shall not ours be as sweet and holy! This setting sun closes our official connexion, with the day; and if our connexion were only official, it would hardly need a memorial,—a sacred "Mizpah," speaking forth the benison of the heart and soul upon him who goes, and upon them who remain. Our union has been too close to be parted without some pain like the breaking of heart-strings, and too dear to be laid aside forever as if there were no future to our love. I feel that we are not separated, though we be absent one from another; and because these words of Sacred Writ denote this mutual state of feeling, I choose them for our farewell, to-day.

For these words imply three facts, which are all, I trust, true of us. They imply, first, a past inti-

macy of peculiar force; they denote, secondly, a separation; and, thirdly, they express a mutual interest for the future.

I. They imply an intimacy of peculiar strength. And what intimacy so close and singular as that of pastor and people? There are other relations of trust and love, which grow out of the constitution of human society and the nature of things, so near and dear that, at first view, nothing could seem nearer. The physician and the lawyer may become, each in his turn, the depositary of some of your most confidential communications. The husband and wife, the brother and sister, have their domestic privacies which no stranger is permitted to invade. And mutual friends, joined by those secret and ineffable affinities out of which our human friendships are woven, may open their hearts to each other in the frankest and fullest interchange of feeling.

Yet, for the most part, all these relations are of the earth and earthy; and the confidence which springs from them is, likewise, of a sort that takes in only the interests and sentiments which belong to our temporal peace, and to the life below. Our health, our wealth, our social enjoyment, and social interest we trust to such friends. In the various

troubles of mind, or body, or estate, we make use of the intimacies which such troubles create, and those intimacies become very dear to us. But the pastoral relation transcends all these, both in its nature and in its power. For the pastoral office is the *care of souls*. The influence of that office reaches, therefore, beyond the outside of a man's life to the depth of his nature; to that secret of self which the common world never sees; reaches beyond the heart from which his usual emotions come into expression, to his heart of hearts. It lays hold on interests, by the side of which life's daily welfare shrinks into worthlessness,—the interests of life everlasting, and the soul's awful destiny of glory or gloom.

The pastor may or may not be the confidant in other matters—of property, reputation, social conduct, and domestic peace. But his province is the soul and its concerns. If a sinner is trembling in the power of convictions wrought by the Holy Ghost; if a soul awakened, but still in darkness, is groping for the way it cannot see, and asking for the light of life; if a penitent is ready to lay his broken heart upon the altar, a glad sacrifice of self-consecration to his redeeming and no longer rejected Lord; if a forgiven suppliant longs to

relieve his bosom of his bursting secret, and tell what the Lord has done for his soul; if the Christian, in doubt, craves instruction and cheering; or the Christian, in duty, longs to lean upon another's arm; or the Christian, in triumph, desires an exulting sympathy; in his sickness, a prayer, in his dying, a word to reassure him, and a finger to point upwards from the cross to the crown; — for each, for all of these the pastor is the God-friend sent on this very errand. And in so far as he is true to his calling, he makes himself the mate of every such soul; counsels, sympathises, weeps and rejoices with it, and above all, lays his own soul side by side with it at the foot of the cross, where, with one heart, they seek for the one needed mercy. Can there be another intimacy to match this one, — purer as it is deeper, and more affectionate as it looks more towards God?

Such my brethren, in some degree, has been our intimacy. In some or all of these relations, we have, for more than sixteen years, been dwelling and acting together. It has been my office and my joy to admit to the communion of the Church the great majority of those whose names are on our register. I have presented for confirmation a still

larger number than the whole list comprises. I have baptized your babes, married your sons and daughters, and buried your dead. In these ministrations I have communed with your intimate thoughts and feelings. I have helped you carry your burdened hearts to the Cross, and have seen the burden lifted off by the hand that is mighty to save; have witnessed the dark weeping of conviction, and the bright tears of pardon; have seen the bleeding and the healing of your hearts; have gone down with you into the valley and up to the mount, in the depth and height of Christian experience. My ear has drunk in your distresses and thrilled with the story of your hopes and of the peace of an indwelling God.

I know not how these ministrations, rendered to you severally, may have inspired you with the sense of intimacy with your pastor; but as these thick memories pass in living procession before me, each recollection seems to put forth a finger and touch some heart string that trembles with the old sympathy. I feel that you and I have been as one, and that our lives — the sacredest and best part of them — have been bound in one bundle. Can any other word so well denote our relationship, as "Mizpah," implying a singular and sacred intimacy?

But it implies more than this, I said; for it denotes a separation. Though Laban and Jacob had lived together twenty years, they parted asunder then. How strange it must have seemed to them!

And when I say that we are to part, my brethren, I can hardly believe my own utterance. The thought loses none of its strangeness by recurrence. It was not so strange at first as it seems to me now, when I am about to take my leave of you. I had habitually, for many years, cherished the thought that I should live and die among you, and when I became possessor of a burial place where lie already one half of my family, I considered myself as giving pledge to the earth and to them and to you, that where they died, I would die, and there would I be buried; dying as your loving pastor, and asking that you, in love, would honor my burial. And why then should there be a separation between us? is a natural question.

As it has been often asked, and as they who ask it are entitled to know, I will briefly answer. My thoughts and observation, for the past few years, have led me to believe that where the connexion of minister and people has been long established, a mutual exchange is sometimes profiable for both

parties. On the one hand, the minister, from long familiarity with his people and his place, is in danger of turning his duties into mere routine, and, presuming upon the kindness of his people, of contenting himself too easily with an incomplete discharge of duty. Their very kindness in bearing and forbearing might work insensibly as a temptation to inefficiency, until he should fall habitually short of his capacity.

In such a case, a new position with its untried circumstances might impart a fresh stimulus to his efforts, and beget worthier results. Or if, from the spontaneous energy of his character or his habitual industry, he should chance to need no such added incentive, yet the advantage of bringing into fresh use all his earlier preparations for the pulpit, would confer a release from that routine-labor whose best incentive is sometimes only the spur of necessity and which, hence, degenerates into drudgery. When the yoke it thus taken off from his faculties, and his study labors are relieved of their character of mere drill, his energy being more spontaneous must become more efficient; his industry, self-chosen, more fruitful. In a word, he receives a new lease of life, —a life begun afresh,—but begun with both the

skill and the fruits of maturity. If, in this supposed change, the minister enters upon a larger field of enterprise, with a twofold congregation, then it would seem most plain that the added facilities and the fuller opportunity for success would leave to his conscience no option. The single and pure desire for usefulness would impel his removal.

To the people, on the other hand, that exchange may be not without its advantage. For their familiarity with their pastor might operate reciprocally as his familiarity with them. The manner, the mode of thought, the style of address, to which they have long been accustomed, might lose a part of their legitimate force. Religious truths, however searching or solemn, might grow tame from the sameness of their exhibition. A congregation might even sink below its own standard of duty and endeavor, simply because the rule and reasons of duty had become trite from repetition. But let a new voice proclaim the same truths in new forms, with a different manner, and the very novelty is awakening. Old duties assume a freshness, and old teachings take on a power, that rouses many a heart which slumbered before. Sinners will be converted who resisted formerly, and Christians will be edified

and advanced, who were sitting still or sliding backwards. Such, or something like such, my brethren, are the reasons which have impelled my removal. I am aware that many of you, in your kindness to me, profess to see no force in the consideration that you will be the gainers by it. Yet I am deliberately persuaded that when, in answer to your prayers, God, shall send you the man whom he has chosen, the time will come when you will gratefully acknowledge that my departure has brought a blessing in its train.

But upon this sad theme of separation, I have said enough to show that I go from you, not because I blindly wish, but because I intelligently ought. If you fail to see the force of my reasons, I pray you charge me not with weakness of affection for you and your dearest welfare. If "Mizpah" be the word of sad significance that denotes our separation, yet let it be likewise the watchword of a loving future. "Mizpah:" "the Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another."

The friendship of Laban and Jacob did not die with their separation. So neither should ours. If any intimacy may claim perpetuity, it must be the

pastoral. We cannot make it otherwise if we would. The contact and communion of minister and people was meant to tell upon eternity, and will be felt for weal or woe forever. They are to meet at the judgment and recognize each other in that relation which will determine how each one shall be judged. Among the revived loves of heaven, will any be more fervent than the pastor's, who stands before the Judge, surrounded by those whom he has led to the Lamb of God, now saved and blessed, and says: "Lord, behold, I, and the children whom thou hast given me?" And will not the Christian's heart glow afresh with the recognition of him who ministered to his soul in so many of the dark and bright passages of his pilgrimage? In my anticipations, brethren, a renewal of the pastoral affection is one of the choicest elements of heaven's happiness. If then our ultimate future must be so intimate, why should not the interval be filled with love? Why not cherish the affectionate sympathy of grace, and let "Mizpah" be with our every thought of each other? "The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another." It is the very prayer of sympathy and the best of holy wishes. And then, what means this holy wish, as you and I

apply it mutually? Let me tell you, dear friends, how much it means with me, when I offer and shall offer the loving aspiration for you. And then I will tell you what I wish it to mean with you, when you follow me with the watchword, "Mizpah."

The Lord watch you, and watch for you, is my prayer. And by this prayer I mean, that, as a church, you may stand fast in the faith and advance far in the practice of the Christian life.

May your minister be one who is God-sent; one who, though breathing the very fog of indifference and negativeism, shall himself be divinely positive and clear; whose trumpet, amidst the many-voiced religions of these times and this place, shall never give an uncertain sound; who, amidst the philosophies of invention, shall be able to perceive and apt to teach the better philosophy of inspiration, and divinely ignoring the partial truths of the Schools, shall proclaim the everlasting world-truth — "truth as it is in Jesus." May he never cloak the Cross with ritualism, and by insisting on some mechanical medium of access to God, hinder the free and instant communion of the soul with its Saviour.

And, on the other hand, may he never so rationalize the Gospel as to expel its pervading supernat-

ural element — so dissect and tear away its peculiar features and teguments of doctrine, as to leave only the stark skeleton and dry bones of natural religion — religion without a Saviour — and, above all, never corrupt the pure blood of the atonement with the foul Sadducean mixture of human worthiness. May he preach not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and be always contented and most thankful to hide behind the Cross, and present to you only the crucified Lamb of God, as the all in all of sinner and of saint, till you are all complete in Him. This, first of all, is the meaning of my prayer, — "the Lord watch over you," as a Church. And then again, I pray for your advancement in the graces of godliness; that you may be filled with Church life — that every one may feel that he owes a duty not only to the cause of Christ at large, but to the Church where his vows are recorded, and to the fellowship consecrated by so many joint prayers; and that your charities, reaching and surpassing your former gifts, may come from poor as well as rich; each one giving as God hath prospered him, not grudgingly or from the constraint of pride or shame, but gladly giving, as the free will offering of a redeemed sinner, who can never thank God

enough in time or in eternity. The Lord watch for this Church; thus, and more than thus, is the meaning of my prayer.

And for you individually, my dear friends, as my mind singles you out, my heart prays this prayer with a fervor that I cannot express. But it means, for you, and for you, and for you severally, and all the persons whom I have loved so well,—may you each one grow daily in grace and in the experimental knowledge of Jesus Christ. May your love and communion with him be daily more intimate; your joy in him abounding; your faith stronger; your hope higher, and Christ Jesus fully formed within your regenerated hearts. And so may you advance higher and holier until, your battle fought and your course finished, you shall see him as he is, and be like him altogether,—a brother or a sister of the Saviour in his glory.

And what I wish this prayer to mean from your lips and in your hearts when you offer it for me, is, that I may be a better minister to others than I have been to you; that my labors may be more successful in winning souls to Christ, and my whole ministry be endued with the unction of the Holy One.

Pray for me, that I may realize in my own experience all that I shall teach of the life of God in the soul; that in alluring to brighter worlds, I may lead the way; and that, when my ministry is closed, when the death-hush is come upon my preaching, and the time of my departure is at hand, then, having fought a good fight and kept the faith, I may be ready to be offered, and go up to receive a benediction and a crown. But let me feel that you are praying for me thus, and if for each other in our separation we thus pray, it cannot be but that our heaven will be happier from that mutual love which has known no pause, and the sympathies that had no gap.

But the moment is at hand for that last word which gives signal that I am to leave this pulpit, and be your minister no more. I would yet linger over the word to thank you for your kindness and consideration to me in many ways. To some of you I have been indebted for most timely and touching acts of good will, which, as they have been profoundly remembered, deserve now to be publicly commemorated. I can render you no return for them, but the gratitude of one who can never cease to be your pastor in all but the name.

I linger yet, to ask your forgiveness for every instance of short-coming and omission in my public or my private duties; and with this last heart-duty done, I nerve myself for that last word—that world-utterance of breaking hearts—*farewell.* It is come at last, crowded with all its holy memories, with all its present solemnities, and, thank God, filled too with no less holy hopes, and so I pronounce it, my beloved people,—I may call you so, once more,—FAREWELL! Yes! fare ye well in all the time and eternity to come; well, in mind and soul; well, in grace and hope and peace,—in every blessed thing! The Lord watch over us when we are absent from one another, and renew our communion in that happier life, where the farewell is never said. It is done.

And now, "May the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen!"